

FOR RELEASE

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Note to editor: *Sheila Kennedy at the South Central Nebraska Area Agency on Aging will receive the first annual Elder Abuse Prevention Advocate of the Year award for central Nebraska on Monday, June 16th, at 2 p.m. at SCNAAA's office, Suttle Plaza, 4623 2nd Ave., Kearney. You are invited to attend. Additional information follows.*

Sheila Kennedy Presented Award for Work to Prevent Elder Abuse

Kearney – Sheila Kennedy, coordinator of Senior Medicare Patrol and the Senior Health Insurance Information Program at the South Central Nebraska Area Agency on Aging, was presented the first annual Elder Abuse Prevention Advocate of the Year award for central Nebraska Monday (6/16) by the Department of Health and Human Services for publicizing services for the elderly and providing information about elder abuse and neglect.

Trenton Waite, DHHS service delivery administrator, made the presentation at the offices of the Area Agency on Aging. The award was presented as a part of DHHS' observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Waite cited Kennedy for her work the past year collaborating with Kearney's S.A.F.E. Center to increase awareness of elder abuse and to remind Nebraskans that if they suspect abuse call 1-800-652-1999.

"Sheila not only promoted various programs and services offered by the Area Agency on Aging, she also increased awareness of elder abuse and what to do about it," he said. "Her integrated approach to advertising was novel and high impact. She showed great resourcefulness."

He said Kennedy coordinated with the S.A.F.E. Center on electronic billboards and advertisements, and she coordinated an event on preventing elder abuse. In addition, she promoted participation in the South Central Coordinated Community Response team to encourage the development of those domestic violence teams in area communities.

"Sheila has helped bring elder abuse to the forefront by working with staff in the agency and community partners," Waite said. "She is helping the elderly, as well as those who know them, so protection from abuse and neglect can be provided. We all could take her lead to expand protection of our elderly citizens."

The Elder Abuse Prevention Advocate of the Year award is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services to recognize Nebraskans across the state who work to protect the elderly.

"The work of many Nebraskans to increase awareness of the signs of elder abuse is important to protect the elderly from abuse and neglect," said Thomas Pristow, DHHS director of Children and Family Services. "It's a partnership and we need everyone's help to identify those who many need our assistance. During this observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness we ask all Nebraskans to observe the elderly around them to ensure they are physically, mentally and financially healthy and report if they aren't. It's our responsibility."

"Our elderly deserve no less than our best protection," said Courtney Miller, DHHS deputy director in Medicaid and Long-Term Care. "When friends and loved ones recognize those signs and then call the Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline, we're able to help them protect the well-being of Nebraska's elderly citizens."

Waite encouraged Nebraskans to watch for elder abuse and urged those who suspect it has occurred to call the Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-652-1999. Among the signs of elder abuse, are:

- Unexplained signs of injury such as bruises, welts, or scars, or broken bones, sprains, or dislocations.
- Bruises around breasts or genitals, or torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
- Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration.
- Untreated physical problems, such as bed sores, and unsanitary living conditions like dirt, bugs, soiled bedding and clothes.
- Significant withdrawals from the elder's accounts, or sudden changes in the elder's financial condition.
- Items or cash missing from the senior's household.
- Problems with the care facility: poorly trained, poorly paid, or insufficient staff; crowding; inadequate responses to questions about care.
- Reports of drug overdose or apparent failure to take medication regularly (a prescription has more remaining than it should).

If abuse is suspected, call the Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-652-1999. The call may be anonymous.